Santisima Muerte

How to Call and Work with Holy Death

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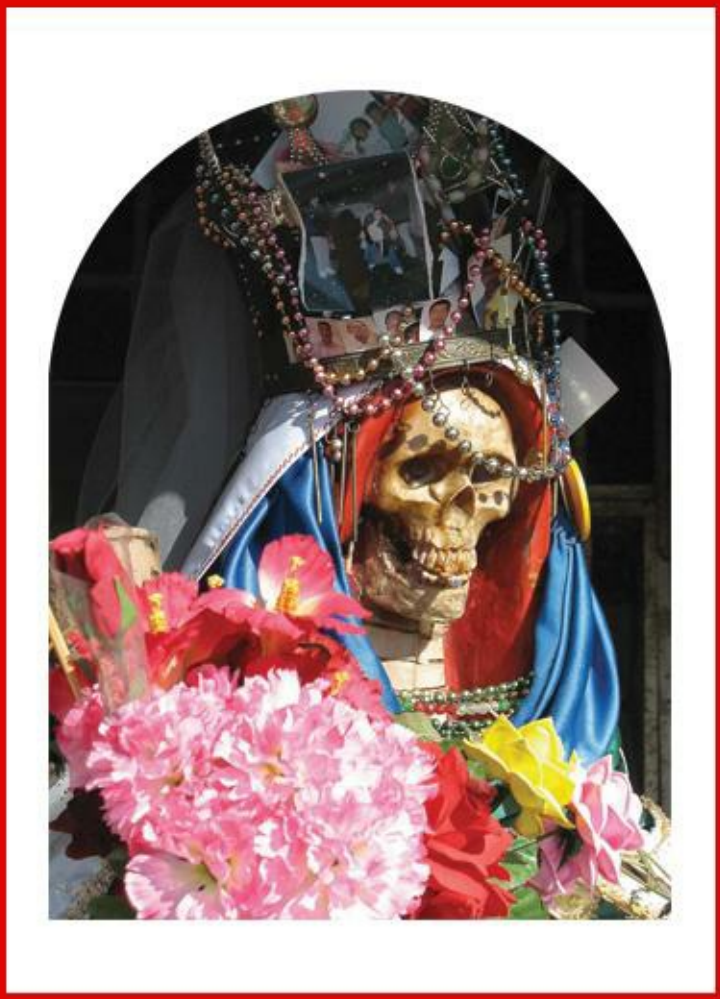

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Introduction

To all mortals Death is the final destination and so a force that represents the inevitable and the mysterious. In modern western culture, Death is viewed as a terrifying force, its personification an aloof and frightening figure waiting to cut down the living and harvest their souls. But not all cultures view death in such dark ways; in Latin American culture Death has grown to become a beloved figure that is not shunned out of fear, but embraced out of love. She is Santisima Muerte.

Santisima Muerte, or Holy Death, is a controversial figure that has grown in prominence over the years. Her history is often quite obscure and the legends around her myriad, but today her cult continues to grow in exponential numbers as she has become a beloved folk saint. Shunned by the Catholic Church, her devotees remain loyal to her as she has transformed not only into the miracle saint par excellence, but has also become a symbol of national pride and racial identity. Today, altars to her can be found in cities all around Mexico and she has started to take residence in neighboring countries, like the United States. Thanks to the internet, interest in her has gone global and people from different cultural backgrounds find themselves drawn to this figure of beloved Holy Death.

While death is universal, Santisima Muerte is a purely Mexican, folk-Catholic phenomenon and should be respected as such. Attempts to syncretize her with neo-pagan deities or to remove her from her cultural roots would be disrespectful both to her and her devotees. But if approached with respect for her cultural background, she then takes on the mantle of a universal force, for truly death comes to all.

This text is written for the sole purpose of enlightening those interested in Santisima Muerte. Her history and various legends will be discussed, but the aim is to provide practical steps on how to establish a relationship with this powerful spirit and how to properly work with her. Included in this booklet shall be traditional novenas, prayers, and orisons all translated from Spanish. All translations are my own.

The History and Legend of Santisima Muerte

There are a variety of legends surrounding Santisima Muerte and some anthropologists and historians of religion have tried to distinguish the history from the myth. However, Santisima Muerte's origins still remain mostly shrouded in obscurity.

Some legends claim that Santisima Muerte is the shadow or darker aspect of the Virgin Mary. Indeed many depictions of Santisima Muerte are that of the Virgin of Guadalupe in a prayerful pose, but skeletal in form. Some devotees refer to her as the sister of the Virgin and it is not uncommon for people to venerate these two side-by-side. Both represent powerful female forces and have taken on motherly roles. The faithful of Santisima Muerte sometimes call her their "godmother" and their love of her seems to rival the love they have for the Virgin Mary—a testament to how large her cult is growing and to the role of mother that these two powerful saints fulfill.

Another legend indicates that she was a nun who lived at one time, suffered heartbreak as a result of being betrayed by her secret lover, and eventually died or committed suicide. When her skeletal remains were found she performed miracles and from there became Santisima Muerte. This legend is more in line with the stories revolving around La Llorona and the Intranquil Spirit. In function, all three entities are called upon to deal with wayward lovers, and so it is likely that this legend may be a result of contact with practitioners familiar with these other entities.

Different people will recount different legends about her, but the most common perspective of Santisima Muerte is that she is the Angel of Death. In this way, while she is referred to as a saint, she actually ranks among the archangels which would also explain her relationship with Saint Michael. In this view, she is the Angel of Death who comes to all and so is the most just of all the celestial figures. Since all are subject to death, her power is seen as second only to God.

Given the large number of legends surrounding her, the origin of each is difficult to trace. However, what is known is that the first depictions of Santisima Muerte seem to have originated from southern Mexico and to this day most of the suppliers of her cult images found in Mexico City come from the south. There may be some link between Santisima Muerte and the Aztec goddess of death and the underworld, Mictecacihuatl. There are some who even indicate that a single continuous cult of death has continued since Aztec times till modern time with the death goddess becoming Santisima Muerte. Historically, there is no clear evidence of a continuous cult of death, but the link in legend is certainly there. There is even a movement by modern Mexican American neo-pagans to reclaim Santisima Muerte from the folk Catholic cult that has grown around her and re-establish her as a pagan goddess.

While there are records of skeletal figures as early at the 19th Century, it wasn't until the 20th Century that records of Santisima Muerte as both protector and love saint are found. It should be noted that even if a continuous cult of death cannot be historically verified, Mesoamerican culture retained its connection to figures of death even after conversion to Catholicism as seen in the celebration of the Day of the Dead and in the figure of El Rey San Pascual. The earliest records of Santisima Muerte veneration seem to revolve around prisons or those facing death. She was often depicted as a skeletal bride or skeleton in a black robe. She was petitioned for a "good death" among those who worked in dangerous professions or for release from imprisonment. It is likely from this historical root that she became

associated with drug-dealers and cartels. Interestingly, just as she became the patron of prisoners, so too did she become the patron of prison guards and today she is still petitioned by drug-traffickers and the police who fight them. This reputation as patron of both-sides was highlighted in the recent drug and gang wars of Mexico where devotees on either side of the line called upon her for protection from death. Those who faced danger called upon her to protect them, but shortly thereafter the wives these men left at home also adopted her but for a different purpose: to bring their men back home. When their men went out in the dark and dangerous world with wives at home, the wives turned to Holy Death to bring back their husbands and to keep them faithful. It is from this that Santisima Muerte's traditional role as protector of those facing danger, and the saint called upon to bring men home, was formed.

The veneration of Holy Death among individuals facing dangerous jobs either by working for the law or against it, along with her veneration by their wives, seems to be the earliest records of her. She may however have existed in some form or another before the 20th Century privately. Her popularity grew in the mid-20th Century as she took on new roles as healer, granter of justice, provider, and much more. While her cult may have become somewhat public during this time, the majority of her devotion remained private. She may traditionally have been petitioned for a good death or protection from death, but she has grown since then. Indeed, she seems to have consolidated the powers of other saints.

In Santisima Muerte, there is a meeting and consolidating of saintly powers. Traditionally, curanderas (practitioners of curanderismo or Latin American Catholic folk magic) called upon a host of saints for a variety of conditions: Santa Elena and Santa Marta were the love saints par excellence, Saint Martin Caballero was the saint of money and business, San Miguel was the great protector and provider of justice, and the Virgin of Guadalupe was called upon to intervene when a miracle was needed. As the cult of Santisima Muerte has grown, she seems to have subsumed the function of these other saints. She is now called upon for love, money, protection, justice, healing, and to perform miracles. Her reputation as "performer saint," or saint that is able to grant petitions and prayers effectively, has become legendary and there are now curanderas who are relying on Santisima Muerte alone rather than a host of other saints.

It is in the last 20 years that the cult of Santisima Muerte has exploded into the public scene. Her cult numbers are growing each day and her devotees publicly honor her with feasts, vigils, and pilgrimages to holy shrines. She has also entered into the popular awareness through her connections with drug-traffickers and it is through this lens that she was introduced to people of the United States in a large scale. Given her rejection by the Catholic Church she's taken on the role as the patron of the marginalized, so she's become protector of those in illicit professions, the poor, homosexuals, transsexuals, women, and other people that may be marginalized by society. Her role as provider of solace for those who feel marginalized or persecuted by society gives hers a unique position; while she has started out on the outskirts, as the movements pushing for recognition and equality for those she protects grows she is carried along with the movement and makes the transition from marginalized saint to a saint in the spotlight.

Though she's been maligned by the Catholic Church and by the media both, her devotees continue to strive to bring awareness to the richness of her cult and to the powerful majesty of this wonderful saint. Despite the attempts to malign her, her cult continues to grow and while her history may not always be clear there is no denying she is a powerful spirit and force. To those who do not know her, she's unfathomable death, but to her devotees she is a familiar member of their family.

The Symbols of Santisima Muerte

Like all saints and folk saints, Santisima Muerte has become associated with a set of symbols, colors, and numbers. Much of her current images and symbols are a result of the influence of spiritual suppliers; a phenomenon noted by famed folklorist, catherine yronwode, who has examined how the image of Santisima Muerte has changed over the past 10-20 years or so. The oldest images of Santisima Muerte were often in a resin color, or skeletal figures dressed as brides or in the vestments of the Virgin, however now people refer to the grim reaper image as traditional. In fact, it was catherine yronwode who noted that even the skeletal structure was an influence of the spiritual supply shops as modern "grim reaper" Santisima Muerte statues actually have a male skeletal structure though they are called female. The adoption of the grim reaper-like Santisima Muerte has resulted in a plethora of traditions on the symbols she's depicted with like the scythe, owl, etc. Though a relatively modern adoption into the cult, they have nevertheless been widely accepted by her followers and devotees.

The same can be said about her traditional colors. While now spiritual suppliers are making Santisima Muerte statues in a variety of colors from purples, greens, to elaborate rainbow-colored ones or ones wearing a gown of money, most curanderas will refer to the red, black, and white Santisima Muerte as the most traditional of her colors. Again this is likely a result of the past 20 years or so since the oldest depictions often were of skeletons that were dressed in a variety of bride gowns or in the robes of the Virgin. It is quite traditional that as an offering a person would get Santisima Muerte a specially tailored dress and in the southern parts of Mexico there are family tailors who specifically make dresses for Santisima Muerte.

While these symbols, colors, and images have become associated with Santisima Muerte through the influence of spiritual supply shops, where they first make an appearance, their acceptance into her following shows the dynamic and living quality of her cult, which is not a static thing, but a force that grows to meet the needs of the faithful and adapts with the times. Accepting this, the symbols, colors, and numbers presented here will reflect the opinion of the older workers and curanderas.

Santisima Muerte's colors are red, white, and black with each representing a different aspect of the saint and containing spells unique to each color. Most altars to her will house three statues in red, white, or black, or will involving shifting the different statues in different positions depending on which Santisima Muerte is being worked with. It is also common to have a single skeletal Santisima Muerte and dressing her according to which color is being invoked. The red Santisima Muerte is called upon for matters of love, desire, passion, and to provide material things. The white Santisima Muerte is called upon for healing, protection, exorcisms, and blessings. The black Santisima Muerte is called upon for aggressive protection, to turn back evil, and to punish enemies.

Another relatively new type of statue that has appeared is the amber statues filled with different herbs, seeds, grains, and charms. These more than likely come from Cuban influence and are descended from the West African magical practices. They are quite popular among spiritual supply shops who often claim that only statues loaded with the right magical combinations are truly effective. While certainly interesting, this is not the case. In reality any image of Santisima Muerte will be accepted by her with her three aspects as black, red, and white being the most preferable.

Her symbols include the scythe, scales, globe, owl, and hourglass. Many of her images or statues will have any combination of these symbols. There are also some statues with removable scythes which can be used in specific types of magical works. For example one may wrap the photo of an enemy around the scythe and place it back in her hands so that the enemy is given over to her, or one may place the scythe over a photo of a troublesome person to pin them down and keep them from meddling. There are other statues where the entire hand of Santisima Muerte is removable. This comes from the tradition of agitating a saint in order to get them to work faster for you. It is in line with placing a statue of a saint upside down, as done with Saint Joseph to get him to help you sell property. There are Saint Anthony statues where the baby Jesus is removable and one promises to return the baby back into his arms when the lost lover or object is returned. In the case of Santisima Muerte statues that have a removable hand, the promise is to return her hand when she carries out the work. I have found such an approach to be not only unnecessary, but that it may cultivate the hostility of the spirit. I find it better to cultivate a relationship of respect and faith, which encourages the saint or spirit far more readily than agitation.

Santisima Muerte is associated with the number 7 and the number 9. It is quite common for people to give her offerings that reflect those numbers. In addition to these symbols she also holds the Aloe Vera plant as sacred and it should be included in any altars that are devoted to her. In traditional curanderismo practices, no altar to Santisima Muerte would be complete without the Aloe Vera plant and there are several specific magical practices and spells that involve working with the plant directly. The placement of the plant holds unique significance. It is hung upside down from its roots to either side of the altar. When placed on the left it wards off evil spirits whereas if placed on the right it attracts good spirits. Before doing a magical work with Santisima Muerte, moving the Aloe Vera plant is necessary; moving it to the left for darker works and moving it to the right for positive works.

Feast Day

Santisima Muerte is venerated on Dia de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead that is usually celebrated on November 1st and 2nd. It is interesting that Dia de los Muertos may have sprung from Aztec celebrations for Mictecacihuatl, again highlighting a link between the two. On this day you could decorate her altar with “ofrendas” or offerings of sugar skulls, sweet breads made in the form of skulls, candles, perfume, tequila, roses, candy, as well as orange Mexican marigold flowers. This flower is believed to be sacred to death in Mexican culture and is placed on graves on this day as offerings, for it gives the dead sustenance and allows them to enter our world.

Since Holy Death teaches us the respect of the afterlife, her holy days should be honored by a celebration of death and life. It is a good time to visit loved ones who have passed, to decorate their graves, leave out offerings, and recall their deeds in life. Gather with family and remember those who have passed away, for so long as they are remembered, they are still alive.

Setting Up an Altar to Santisima Muerte

Any surface can be made into an altar of Santisima Muerte though many practitioners indicate she prefers to have her own space rather than share with other spirits, or saints. Her altar should include her image, preferably with all her three traditional colors represented, a small clay pot with 7 coins, filled with water, and 6 yellow or white flowers, a rosary, a cup of fresh water, and an Aloe plant hanging upside down to the left of the altar, roots and all. The Aloe plant is sacred to Santisima Muerte and the position that it is hung pertains to various spiritual works. Leaving the Aloe plant to the left of the altar is a protective act and keeps you safe from evil spirits, placing it to the right will draw helpful spirits. Before any trabajos, or works, with Santisima Muerte you must move the Aloe plant to either side. This is the bare minimum of an altar for her, though the more you build it up the better connection you can form with her. Other elements could include fruits like apples and oranges, cigarettes, rum and tequila, tortillas, fresh red or white flowers, and cinnamon candies.

Once a week water, alcohol, flowers, and foods should be replaced and these can also act as offerings given to her along with candles.

To consecrate the altar to her you can perform a simple rite like the following:

Materials:
Florida Water or Siete Machos perfume
Copal resin
Charcoal and something to burn it in
White candle
White flowers
White table cloth
Rosary

Cleanse and wash the surface with Florida Water or Siete Machos perfume. If it is a wood surface be careful not to damage it with the alcohol-based cologne. After you've cleansed the surface, cover it with your white table cloth and light your charcoal. Sprinkle the Copal on the burning charcoal and let the smoke waft up.

Move around the table with the smoke, making circles around it, either by walking around it or by circling it with your hand. This is quite easy if you have a thurible or censor. As you let the smoke consecrate the altar, pray a short prayer like the following:

Holy Death, dear to my heart, do not abandon me
Protect me, stand by me, and walk with me.
Beloved Santisima Muerte bless this place as your holy site.

Make sure that the smoke touches the table, the statues, Aloe plant, and all other parts of the altar. Repeat the prayer three times, then wipe the table gently with the white roses and place them on the altar. Light your candle and let it burn down. Anoint the statue or image of Santisima Muerte with Siete Machos perfume and anoint her rosary while praying the orison above. Dangle the rosary from her hand, or wrap

it around the image. This process minus the cleansing with the perfume can be repeated over nine days for a stronger effect.

Your altar is now consecrated and can be built accordingly. Include images, objects, and symbols devoted to her on your altar. Decorate as necessary; make sure any fruit, flowers, and water are fresh. Some people insist that you only use holy water, but fresh spring water will also work well. The more love and attention you put into it, the more you'll be able to cultivate her presence on your altar. Each element included on the altar brings her presence just a little closer.

Working with Santisima Muerte

Working with Santisima Muerte follows a traditional format with certain elements that are unique to her, while others are familiar to anyone who has worked with saints in a folk-magical manner. There are three elements that are essential to working any trabajo or spell with Santisima Muerte: the amparo, the tributa, and the ex voto.

The Amparo

Before working with Santisima Muerte it is important to discuss the essential element of the amparo. This is a protective pact made with a guardian saint to help mediate and ameliorate the influence of Holy Death. In traditional Mexican folk magic, the belief is that whenever one is doing a spell, a protective rite is needed to ensure that the spell cannot be reversed. This is also essential in cleansing others, to ensure that what you cleanse off does not enter you. When working with Santisima Muerte, the amparo acts as both protection and to temper her influence. Being the force of death embodied, she can be overwhelming and so the amparo not only offers protection from death, but allows you to work with her without being overwhelmed. The term amparo refers to a legal term and in working with Santisima Muerte it allows one to work with spiritual forces without allowing them to impact the petitioner.

Traditionally people who work with Santisima Muerte invoke the power of either Saint Michael or Saint Cyprian to make amparos as these are the two saints believed to have the power to temper her influence. To make an amparo place your photo in between images of either saint with their faces outwards and light a votive or vigil candle on it; for Saint Michael a white or red candle is appropriate, and purple or white for Saint Cyprian. Recite their orison and ensure that the light remains on while you work with Santisima Muerte. This is especially important when you first start working with Santisima Muerte and when doing heavier or darker work. Without this level of protection you may find yourself overwhelmed by her and her influence.

Orison for Saint Cyprian:
Saint Cyprian, grant me your protection and liberate me from all danger.
I ask you to unbind all curses, hexes, and bewitchments.
Rescue me from the rabid wolf and guard me from all evil.
I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.
Orison for Saint Michael:
Saint Michael the Archangel,
Defend us in battle.
Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humble pray;
And do Thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host—
By the Divine Power of God
Cast into hell, Satan and all the evil spirits,
Who roam throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls.
Amen.

The amparo is always the first step in any major working with Santisima Muerte. Over time as your

relationship with her develops, the amparo can be reserved for heavier works. Small prayers and petitions can be presented to her without an amparo as you develop more of a feel for her and her presence becomes more temperate. You can also tie the picture packet together to create a permanent amparo and occasionally light candles on it when needing extra protection.

There are some accounts from practitioners that indicate that Saint Cyprian must be kept on a separate altar from Santisima Muerte as their powers tend to clash and conflict. I have not experienced this, but I do keep the altars of Santisima Muerte and Saint Cyprian separate.

Tributa

For any large working with Santisima Muerte a tributa is needed, which calls upon the powers of Santisima Muerte while also ensuring the protection of the person calling upon those powers. The tributa is necessary especially when first starting to work with Santisima Muerte. This is done by taking an unglazed clay pot and filling it with fresh water, putting in seven coins and six white flowers. You then take this to a cemetery and leave it at the gate and speaking from the heart tell Santisima Muerte this gift is for her and ask her to work for you. Walk away without looking back.

The tributa opens the gates to Santisima Muerte to work on your behalf, but keeps you safe from other spirits that may be attracted to you from your work. The number of coins varies from practitioner to practitioner; some say three and others seven. In either case, the coins are offerings to the spirits of the cemetery and the six flowers represent the six good spirits of the days of the week invoked for protection, with the seventh being Santisima Muerte herself. The tributa can also be used as a form of appeasement if you discover that someone has sent Santisima Muerte against you, or you have offended her. By putting in place an amparo and then performing the tributa, you can gain her protection and turn back her hand.

Over time as you cultivate a relationship with Santisima Muerte, the tributa can be made and kept on the altar rather than taken to the cemetery. However, at the beginning it is essential to carry it to the cemetery and leave it as an offering. Those individuals who have worked with Santisima Muerte for a while often make this tributa, but only carry it out to the cemetery during larger works, but not necessarily for smaller devotional works.

The use of the tributa opens up the gates and brings in the power of Santisima Muerte strong and fast. As that power is cultivated on her altar, the tributa can be left there.

Ex Voto

The ex voto is an offering made to Santisima Muerte or any saint for favors granted. Folklorist E. Bryant Holman calls this the “manda.” When working with Santisima Muerte, one promises to give her offerings in return for the “trabajo” or work she does for you. The ex voto then is an offering given in fulfillment of a vow. These take a variety of forms, but the most common is giving her nine candles; three red, three white, and three black. There are other variations of candle offerings from twelve; four of each color, or twenty-one; seven of each color. She is also given offerings of apples, cigarettes, tequila, rum, flowers, spicy candies, as well as giving her more customized gifts like buying her a new dress for her statues, or making a pilgrimage to one of her shrines. Those that make these pilgrimages usually make it by foot, carrying her statue with the last few steps being done on their knees.

A common ex voto found in Latin American folk-magic tradition that is traceable to the Iberian Peninsula and the practices of the Spanish and Portuguese is the milagro charm. These charms take a variety of shapes and usually are reflective of the petition that has been granted, or the miracle provided. For example, if Santisima Muerte were to help you in your arm surgery, a milagro of an arm would be obtained and given to her. The milagro charm can be taken to one of her shrines, placed on a home altar, or even sewn into the altar cloth or her gown. It is quite common to find public altars for her at botánicas where people have sewn milagro charms on her gown. Milagro charms are made in a variety of shapes, sizes, and forms for any petition that one may take to a saint. These charms can also be used as talismanic objects carried on the person while petitioning Santisima Muerte.

It is essential to keep your vows to Santisima Muerte as she can be one of the more demanding saints. When she comes through for you, be prompt in completing the ex voto whether it is giving her candles, a milagro, flowers, or something more customized, but do be sure to follow through. Delays in giving her what is owed to her or failure to give her the offerings promised may lead to her taking back what she gave to you in the first place.

The Trabajos of Santisima Muerte

Santisima Muerte has a complete system of magic all to her own. As her popularity has grown, the sphere of things she can be called upon for has grown as well. Where once a practitioner would call upon different saints for each situation they faced, now it is common to find Santisima Muerte called upon for all of it and so her workings have come to be regarded as a complete magical system.

Typically there are two ways of working with Santisima Muerte, through her novena or through a spell, which are commonly known as trabajos or works. In either case, it is important to ensure that the amparo and tributa are performed and an ex voto is offered. Finally, make sure to move her sacred Aloe plant according to your intentions: left if you are doing harsher works and right if you are doing works of love and drawing.

Novena of Santisima Muerte

The novena to Santisima Muerte is the most traditional way of working with her and its form is very similar to novenas done on behalf of other saints. A novena is a religious act performed over nine days that involves prayer and usually includes the lighting of a vigil candle. One vows to pray the novena for nine days in return for the intervention of the saint that is being petitioned.

Santisima Muerte's novena starts on a Sunday at midnight though occasionally some will begin her novena on a Tuesday. It should be done at her altar, or at least before her printed image and requires a red novena candle which you will burn for nine days. This can be nine separate votive candles that are burned down each day, or it can be a glass encased candle left on for the entire nine days. The latter is preferred by most practitioners, but it should be noted that most glass-encased vigil candles which are advertised as lasting seven days often burn down in five so this should be taken into consideration. Another method that has been adopted into her cult from Cuba and the Caribbean is the use of lamps, both kerosene and homemade. These too would be left lit for the entirety of the nine days like the vigil candle.

In addition to the candle and image, a glass of fresh water is needed, and a piece of paper upon which you have written your request. Her novena is most commonly used to return a wayward lover, but can be adapted for any situation that requires the intervention of Santisima Muerte. If done to return a lover, a photo of the individual should be placed under the cup of water. To begin the novena make sure you have your amparo in place then light your candle and write your petition and place it beneath the candle. Ensure that the candle and water are both before the image of Santisima Muerte. Begin each day of prayers with the Jaculatoria prayer. This is a prayer that is to be memorized and repeated each day. It is a common practice to recite the Jaculatoria throughout the day and this often can be a source of solace and comfort during times of trouble. When you are out and about, taking a moment to recite the Jaculatoria continues the power of the novena while attuning you to the spiritual current of the work.

The Jaculatoria prayer that should be recited before each day of the novena for Santisima Muerte is:

Beloved Death, dear to my heart,
Do not abandon me, protect me, and do not
Let (name of wayward lover) have one moment of peace;
Do not let him rest, bother him unceasingly with
Thoughts of me.

The Jaculatoria prayer can be altered to fit any petition or situation, not just to return a wayward lover. After the Jaculatoria recite each prayer according to the day of the novena.

First Day:
"Holy Death, through the favors that you grant me
Make me overcome any difficulties that for me nothing is impossible,
No treacherous obstacles, no hindrances, nor any enemies.
That no person does me harm,
And only friends come into my path,
And that all my endeavors are victorious,

And everything I do, flourishes.
Fill my home with success and protect them with your virtues."
(Say three Our Fathers)

Day Two:
"Holy Death, my great treasure,
Never leave my side at any time:
You ate bread and gave me a piece,
And as the powerful host of the dark in this mansion in life
And empress of the darkness,
I want you to grant me this favor that (name of wayward lover)
Humbly falls before my feet remorseful
And that he/she never leaves my side, so long as I need him/her.
Make him/her fulfill what she/he promised me."
(Say three Our Fathers)

Day Three:
"Jesus Christ, who on the cross was conquered,
Conquer (name of wayward lover) that he/she falls before my feet.
In the name of our Lord, they are a wild animal; they shall return tame as sheep,
As soft as Rosemary.
Beloved Death, I beg that with the massive force that God gave you
That you instill in (name)'s heart that he/she has eyes only for me
And I am everything for him/her,
Please grant me the favor that I am asking,
Having faith in your novena, and I will light a candle
Every Tuesday of every week at midnight in your honor."
(Say three Our Fathers)

Day Four:
"Dear Death:
I ask you with all my heart,
Just as God made you immortal, and the powerful host
And queen of the never-ending darkness
That with your great power you hold over all mortals,
Make (name of wayward lover) unable to eat at any table,
Nor sit in any chair,
Nor have a moment of peace,
I ask that you make him/her come to my feet,
Humble and remorseful.
Draw (name) closer and never let him/her leave."
(Say three Our Fathers)

Day Five:
"Glorious and Powerful Death,
I wish to take advantage of your kindness,
As my protector and host,

I ask that you grant me this:
As the invincible force you are,
I beg that you make (name of wayward lover)
So he/she cannot find joy in his/her path,
Nor find a lover,
Nor eat, nor sleep if he/she is not at my side.
Let his/her thoughts be of me and me alone
And he/she give me all his/her love and fill me with happiness."
(Say three Our Fathers)

Day Six:
"Oh sovereign Lady
Whom our eternal Father's divine trinity
Has elected to blind the life of mortals,
Whom every mortal will see, sooner or later
Whether rich or poor.
And she takes us all, old, young and child;
Whom she must take to her domain
When God decrees her to;
I beg that you make (name of wayward lover)
Fall in love with me, not just for my physical beauty
But my inner soul
And that he/she comes to me docile, faithful and kneeling at my feet."
(Say three Our Fathers)

Day Seven:
"Immortal Death,
Free me from all evil
And with the great power
Which God has granted you,
Let us rejoice eternally
Glorious days without night.
My protector, my mistress
I ask that you grant me the favors
I ask in this novena."
(Say three Our Fathers)

Day Eight:
"Miraculous and Majestic Death:
I ask that with your immense power
You give back (name of wayward lover)
Do not give him/her one moment of peace
if he/she is with someone else,
neither with friends or other women/men will he/she be pleased.
When asleep then let him/her dream of me,
When awake then let him/her be thinking of me
And these words I say, let him/her obey

And grant me what I ask."
(Say three Our Fathers)

Day Nine:
"Holy Protector Death:
With the virtue that God granted you,
I ask you to free me of all evil and dangerous illnesses
And instead grant me
Luck, Health, Happiness, and Money.
Let only friends come near,
And free me of my enemies;
And make (name of wayward lover)
Present himself/herself humble at my feet,
Asking for my forgiveness,
Humble like a lamb and true to his/her promises,
Always loving and docile."
(Say three Our Fathers)

Once the novena is complete, it is best to keep the altar as it is until the petition has been granted. Make sure to put a fresh glass of water out each week. Once the petition has been granted one has to follow through with the promise of this novena which is to offer Santisima Muerte a candle every Tuesday as her offering. This is payment for her providing you with what you asked her for.

Santisima Muerte Oil #1

This recipe is a traditional blend that is used for Santisima Muerte and is good for any petition. It can be used to anoint objects that are being blessed, candles for spellwork, or can be used as a scent for when attracting a lover.

Materials
Dried Rose Petals
Dried Rosemary
Dried Hibiscus
Orange Essential Oil
Rose Essential Oil
Carrier Oil (Sweet Almond Oil, or Jojoba Oil)
Dark-colored bottle (brown or blue preferable)

This oil should be made during a waxing moon and preferably at night. In the dark-colored glass put in your dried Rose Petals, Rosemary, and Hibiscus praying over each by calling out to Santisima Muerte and asking her to lend her power to the oil. Cover the mixture with your carrier oil and slowly start adding your essential oils drop by drop; 3 drops of Orange essential oil and 5 drops of Rose essential oil. Again pray over the oil asking Santisima Muerte to bless the oil with her power, making sure to breathe the prayer into the bottle. Close the lid and place this on Santisima Muerte's altar for at least 9 nights. Shake the oil up daily while praying to really get the power flowing into the oil.

Amarre: The Love Binding

After the novena for Santisima Muerte, the red spell or the amarre is one of the most traditional trabajos. Whereas the novena can be customized for any petition, though it is commonly used to bring back a wayward lover, the amarre is specifically used to draw back a wayward lover, keep them faithful, and enflame their passion and desire for you. There are variations on how the spell is worked, though most of the common methods involve working over seven days using photos, pins, and specific prayers often found in little prayer booklets in botánicas everywhere.

Materials
1 red vigil candle
1 red candle
3 pins
Photos of yourself and target
Siete Machos perfume
Santisima Muerte Oil
Cup of water

Start by performing an amparo to either Saint Cyprian or Saint Michael to ensure you are protected as you begin your work. Then complete the tributa by taking the clay pot of flowers, water, and coins to the cemetery. Call upon the power and protection of Santisima Muerte and leave the clay pot at the gate of the cemetery. When you return home, set up your altar and anoint the statue or image of Santisima Muerte with Siete Machos perfume. If you have all three colors of Santisima Muerte, either perform this before the red one or move the red one to the center of the altar and place the cup of water and candles before the image. Take the Aloe plant and hang it upside down to the right side of Santisima Muerte using a red string or cord wrapped around the roots. While doing this pray:

"Blessed Aloe, Sacred Aloe, Holy Aloe through your virtue that you
Gave the apostles, I ask that you give to me this same virtue for
I honor you and love you. I ask that you may free me from evil,
Illnesses, bad luck, that I do well, and drive away evil from my home and
Free me from enemies wherever I may go:
That you bless me with fortune
With all ease; your virtue will make me strong, famous, fortunate, and joyous.
Remove all obstacles from my desires; this virtue that God gave you.
In God I believe and you I trust.
Through all of virtue that you bestow upon me, I will defeat
All obstacles that are presented to me.
I ask that you bless me and my home with your virtue, Holy Aloe."

Take your red vigil candle and add a drop of Siete Machos perfume. Be very careful to only add a drop and rub it into the wax for the perfume is flammable. Set this before the image of Santisima Muerte and light it while praying the Jaculatoria. This is the same prayer used in the novena. Spend a few moments focusing on your desire and letting yourself bathe in the energy of Santisima Muerte.

Next take the photo of yourself and the photo of your target. On the back of your photo write your full name, date of birth, and the name of the saint on whose day you were born. Do the same on your target's photo with their information. To find out the saint's day you can consult a Catholic calendar. Take the photos and place them face to face with your own on top. Take two of the pins and pin the photos together with one pin stuck vertically and the other horizontally making a cross. Place this under the cup of water before the statue of Santisima Muerte.

Take the red candle and dress or anoint it with your Santisima Muerte oil while focusing on your desire. Set this to the other side of her statue so that the vigil is on her left, this candle to her right, and the cup of water in the front and center. Light the candle and pray the following prayer of Santisima Muerte:

"Jesus Christ, who on the cross was conquered,
Conquer (name of wayward lover) that he/she falls before my feet.
In the name of our Lord, they are a wild animal;
they shall return tame as sheep,
As soft as Rosemary.
Beloved Death, I beg that with the massive force that God gave you
That you instill in (name)'s heart that he/she has eyes only for me
And I am everything for him/her,
Please grant me the favor that I am asking
Amen."

Spend a moment focusing on your desire then take up the third pin and heat it up in the flame of the red candle and with intent stick the pin in the candle imagining it pricking the heart of your target and making them restless with thoughts of you. As you do this pray the following prayer:

"Spirit, Body, and soul (name of intended)
Come to me for I call you
I compel you,
I command you.
You shall not rest until you humbly fall before my feet.
Just like this pin in the middle of the candle,
You shall not forget me and come to me for I am calling you.

(Repeat this three times)

Spirit of Saint Cyprian bring (name of intended) to me,
Spirit of Saint Helen bring (name of intended) to me,
Spirit of Saint Martha bring (name of intended) to me,
Saint of their day, (name the their saint),
Guardian Angel of (name of intended),
Twist his/her heart, let him/her not rest in peace
Until he/she comes to me and falls at my feet
Overwhelmed with love for me and me alone.

Spend a few moments focusing on your desire, seeing your intended coming to you with love in their heart. Then snuff out the red candle, while leaving the vigil candle lit. The next day recite the Jaculatoria, followed by lighting the red candle, reciting the prayer of Santisima Muerte, and then heating up the pin and sticking it in the candle again with the final prayer. Repeat this over seven days snuffing out the red

candle while keeping the vigil candle lit the entire time. Once the spell is complete, keep the photos with the pins under your mattress and make sure to give Santisima Muerte her ex voto when she grants your request.

The Black Work

Along with the variations of red spells used for love, the black spell is one of the most common and traditional spells and works calling upon Santisima Muerte. In this work, she is called upon in her role as the embodiment of death to carry out a work of revenge against an enemy. It is often considered a very dangerous work and should be approached with caution. This work should be done before the black Santisima Muerte.

Materials
Black candle
Black string or ribbon
Photo/trace of the individual
Black marker
Siete Machos Perfume
1 cigarette

Before beginning this spell it is paramount that an amparo along with tributa is completed. In this type of working, it is important to complete all the necessary steps and actually take the tributa to the gates of the cemetery. Move your Aloe plant to the left before you begin. Once this is done take your black candle and carve the name of your enemy on the candle and light this while praying to Santisima Muerte that she come and take this person out of your life. By the light of this candle take the photo and write the person's name on the back three times along with their date of birth. Take your black marker and put an "X" on their eyes and mouth. Light the cigarette and blow three times on the photo, place the cigarette on the lips of Santisima Muerte for her to smoke, then place this before her as an offering. Take your black string or ribbon and anoint it with Siete Machos perfume and wrap the photo of the person around the scythe of the black Santisima Muerte; if you have a trace, make sure that it is tied around the scythe along with the photo. By the light of the candle spend a few moments praying to Santisima Muerte asking her to carry out your revenge, asking her to reverse the person's evil back onto them, and to carry them out of your life for good.

A petition like this puts the work in the hands of Santisima Muerte who is the ultimate arbiter of justice and fairness. It leaves it up to her what their punishment should be, but remember that she is Death so be absolutely sure you want to carry out this work.

Protective Amulet of Santisima Muerte

Amulets or amuletos are created quite frequently by curanderas working with Santisima Muerte and especially for those individuals who may have dangerous professions. These can include both police offices and the people working outside the law. Interestingly, the role of protector falls to both the black Santisima Muerte as well as the white Santisima Muerte. The black Santisima Muerte offers protection from death and is especially called upon to protect from hidden dangers and to help you remain undetected by the law. The white Santisima Muerte is called upon to protect from evil and harm. To create an amulet you can work with either Santisima Muerte.

Materials
Santisima Muerte medallion or rosary
Siete Machos perfume
Santisima Muerte oil
White or black candle (depending on which color Santisima Muerte is being invoked)
Copal resin with charcoal and incense burner

Make sure the Aloe plant is to the left of the altar and light your incense using the charcoal and incense burner, then place this before the image or statue of Santisima Muerte. Anoint the candle with Santisima Muerte oil and spend a few moments meditating before its light. Take up the medallion or rosary and anoint it with the Siete Machos while praying that Santisima Muerte bless it with her protection. Hold the amulet over the rising smoke of the Copal for a minute or two as you continue praying, then hang it from her statue and let it stay there for a week. During that week light a candle each day while you anoint the medallion with the perfume and smoke it in incense. Afterwards it can be worn on the person to carry the protection of Santisima Muerte.

To Release Someone From Jail

Santisima Muerte's role as the saint who can help get justice for people or help them get released from jail comes from two very distinct aspects of her cult. First her connection with the marginalized and popularity with those who have lives filled with danger, especially those working outside the law, and second with the reality that prison is a grave of sorts. She is therefore called upon and petitioned to either gain release from jail, or to aid in a court case. This can of course be performed on behalf of someone who is in jail and seeking release. Simply adjust the wording accordingly. Either the black or white Santisima Muerte can be called upon for this work depending on the innocence of the person.

Materials
7 white candles (or 7 black)
White Ribbon
Siete Machos Perfume
White glass-encased vigil candle
Santisima Muerte Oil
3 pennies
A metal key

Make sure to move the Aloe plant to the right side of Santisima Muerte and begin by anointing your vigil candle and lighting it. Place this to the left of Santisima Muerte. Take the white stand-alone candle and anoint with oil, light and place to the left. Anoint the white ribbon with Siete Machos perfume and make nine knots in it, but lightly. Anoint the three coins and key with the perfume and place all of this before her image. Then while reciting the following prayer unknot the first knot on the ribbon:

"Holy Death who all will meet,
I implore you to unbind the injustice against me,
Though we all are headed to the prison of the grave,
Let me not be held in prison while alive.
With the power granted to you by Jesus Christ
Take these keys and coins and seek my freedom.
May I be released from my bondage and
May justice be served.
Amen."

Every day light another white candle and undo another knot while reciting the prayer above. On the last day take the coins, key, and ribbon and carry them with you as amuletos, or send them to the person on whose behalf you performed the trabajo.

Healing Trabajo

This particular working was taught to me by a curandera in Southern California and is quite interesting because of its use of water. This use is very similar to the way the practitioners of espiritismo use water in healing. It is a simple working, but one that is quite effective in the removal of illnesses, sickness, and can speed up recovery.

Materials
Separate cup of water from usual offering
White vigil candle
Siete Machos Perfume

Ensure that the sacred Aloe plant is on the right side of the altar and begin by slowly passing the lit white candle in circles over the head of the sick person. This should be done in a clockwise fashion and the candle should not be dressed with any oils or perfumes. Place the candle before Santisima Muerte's altar along with the cup of water. Pray that she bless the water and add a few drops of Siete Machos perfume to the water. Lightly dip your fingers in the water and slowly run your wet fingers down the body of the client from head to toe. Do this seven times while praying that the holy water cleanse, purify, and heal the individual. When you are done leave the candle lit and take the water and dispose of it off your property.

Limpia

The limpia, or cleansing, refers to a specific cleansing and purification rite that is found among the various cultures of Latin America with deep roots in shamanic practices and curanderismo. Anyone who has grown up in a Latin American country will likely be familiar with a limpia or had one at some point; it is extremely common for an elder to give limpias, especially to children. While there are different variations of how to perform a limpia, they generally involve acts of brushing, egg cleansings, spraying, and suffumigation. This is accompanied by prayers and occasionally with candles. In the more urban areas where commercial spiritual supply shops have had an influence on individual practitioners some have adopted the use of aerosol cleansing products often as replacement of the mouth spray or smoking of the client and have also started using specially made perfumes.

Different practitioners will have different ways of performing a limpia, from the simple egg cleansings to those with elaborate ritual tools. There are variety of limpias that call upon Santisima Muerte specifically. One of the most common is as follows and can be used to remove any form of spiritual illness, curse, and to aid in the healing and recovery of a person. Limpias are also used to aid in recovering from natural illnesses as well and to speed up the healing process, as often curanderas are also herbal doctors and the only healer in rural areas.

Materials
White vigil candle
Stand-alone white candle
Cigar
Rum
Siete Machos Perfume
Bundle of Rue
Egg
Cup of Water

Begin by lighting your white vigil candle and praying for the aid of Santisima Muerte in cleansing the person you wish to perform the limpia on. Then take your white stand-alone candles and roll this on the body of the individual from head to toe, ensuring that you are constantly moving in a downward fashion. While doing this pray that the white candle absorbs all the negativity, curses, illnesses and such from the person. Light the candle and place on the altar to let everything absorbed be burned and disposed. Next take the bundle of Rue and brush the person with this, again making sure to brush downward. This is to wipe away anything that may cling to the spirit of that person. When you've thoroughly brushed them, toss the bundle of Rue on the ground and have the individual wipe their feet on it, then stepping forward push the bundle behind them. Next take your egg and rub it carefully all over the individual, again ensuring that you are moving in a downward fashion. While doing this pray that the egg absorbs any remaining negativity, illness, or curses. When you've done this crack the egg in the glass of water. If you are familiar with egg divination, you can read the egg in the glass. Place the glass of water and egg on Santisima Muerte's altar. Take the bottle of rum and putting some in your mouth spray the individual with it by blowing the rum out of your mouth. The aim is not to soak or spit on the person, but to let the rum spray out and cover an area. It is best to put ample space between you and the person; some individuals will use their hands to cover the face of that person to keep from soaking them. Do this a total of three times,

spraying in the direction of their head or slightly above. Light the cigar and suffumigate the person. This can be done by sucking in the smoke and blowing out on them, or flipping the cigar and putting the lit side inside your mouth and blowing the smoke through the cigar and out the other end. In either case the smoke should touch all parts of the body for it fortifies and strengthens while cleansing away the bad. End the limpia by anointing the person with Siete Machos perfume, especially their hands and head. When you are done you dispose the materials off your property. In cases where there was a heavy spiritual mess it is not uncommon to soak the used Rue bundle with Siete Machos perfume and light it on fire.

Conclusion

The cult of Santisima Muerte continues to grow every day as more and more people find solace in her, for she is absolute justice, unshakable fairness, and the force of death come to help the living. While her cult continues to grow and evolve, I think it is important for those who enter the cult from cultures outside the one that she has made her home, to respect the religious and cultural elements that she has adopted. However, as death is universal, anyone can approach her, for she has something to teach us all about living and dying.

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